

ISSUE #8

How should travel be managed to provide access for recreation, commercial uses, and general enjoyment of the public lands while protecting natural and cultural resources?

Travel and access considerations are of major importance to all users of public lands. Interest in this issue comes from hunters, energy developers, off-highway recreationists, livestock grazers, wilderness advocates, wildlife advocates, landowners with private inholdings, adjacent Federal and State agencies, general recreationists, and tribal interests, to name a few.

This planning issue contains three interrelated items:

1. the status of the transportation system within the planning area
2. the designation of areas and routes as open, closed or limited
3. the acquisition of lands or interest in lands (easements) to provide legal access

Transportation System

The current transportation system covering the planning area is being mapped with the best available information to provide baseline information on the existing roads and trails and whether or not they fall within BLM's jurisdiction for management. This will require coordination with the Forest Service and Beaverhead and Madison Counties along with the State of Montana agencies such as the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC).

Travel Designations

Current travel management which includes the designation of areas and routes as open, closed or limited on BLM lands is governed by the Southwest Montana Interagency Travel Plan. Once the Montana/Dakotas BLM issues a Record of Decision, the Off-Highway Vehicle Plan prepared jointly by the BLM and Forest Service for public lands in Montana and North and South Dakota will amend the Southwest Montana Interagency Travel Plan on BLM-administered lands to limit all travel in Open areas to existing roads and trails. The amendment then specifies that priority travel planning areas will be identified within six months of the decision, and that road and trail designations or redesignations would be made through the land use planning process. BLM planning guidance indicates those decisions will be made on a planning area basis during preparation of RMPs. The RMP will therefore address these designations across the planning area. Travel management decisions provided in the January 2002 Centennial Valley Travel Plan will be incorporated into the RMP.

Some major factors and considerations in alternative formulation and estimation of effects for travel planning in the RMP will include the following:

- access needs for energy development
- recreational use needs
- access to areas important to Native Americans
- other commodity and administrative needs
- road densities and habitat fragmentation
- maintenance levels
- fragile soils
- erosion concerns
- protection of resource values
- travel impacts on private land
- access to private inholdings
- adjacent State and Federal ownerships and travel plans
- public health and safety
- conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users
- spread of noxious weeds
- Wilderness Study Areas

Easements/Acquisitions

Using the baseline transportation system information, coupled with travel designations, areas or locations where additional legal access may need to be acquired may be identified in the plan. The RMP will also provide guidelines on the manner in which the BLM would pursue such acquisitions.